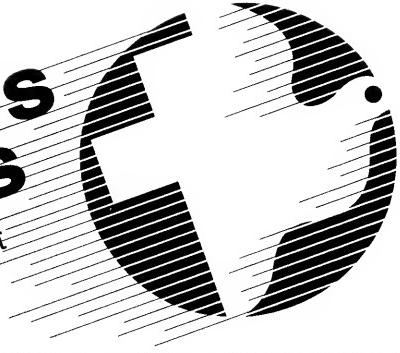


- A publication of MCC Committees on Women's Concerns
- May-June 2000
- Report No. 150

# Women's Concerns

Report



## Whatever happened to the prophetic voice?

The title question for this issue seems to imply that the prophetic voice has disappeared, caught laryngitis, been silenced, or gone somewhere into hiding. Based on what I've been hearing lately, I'm not sure that's true.

The dictionary defines a prophet in several ways: 1) one who speaks by divine inspiration or as the interpreter through whom the will of God is expressed; 2) one who is gifted with profound moral insight and exceptional powers of persuasion; 3) the chief spokesperson for a movement or cause.

In our context, we combine elements of all three definitions. A person with a prophetic voice in the church today is likely to be speaking out forthrightly about what she or he perceives to be God's truth on a given issue. Often, although not always, a prophet is at odds with conventional wisdom, political correctness, and/or the thoughts and practices of the mainstream church. In this same way, prophets in the Old Testament often spoke the word of the Lord against what the kings and leaders of Israel were doing. Prophets call people back to biblical truth. They often speak on behalf of those who have no voice and are themselves often marginalized.

So the question remains. Has the prophetic voice in Brethren in Christ and Mennonite communities been marginalized or silenced? Contributors to this issue of *Women's Concerns Report* answer that question in different ways, beginning with my own personal perspective.

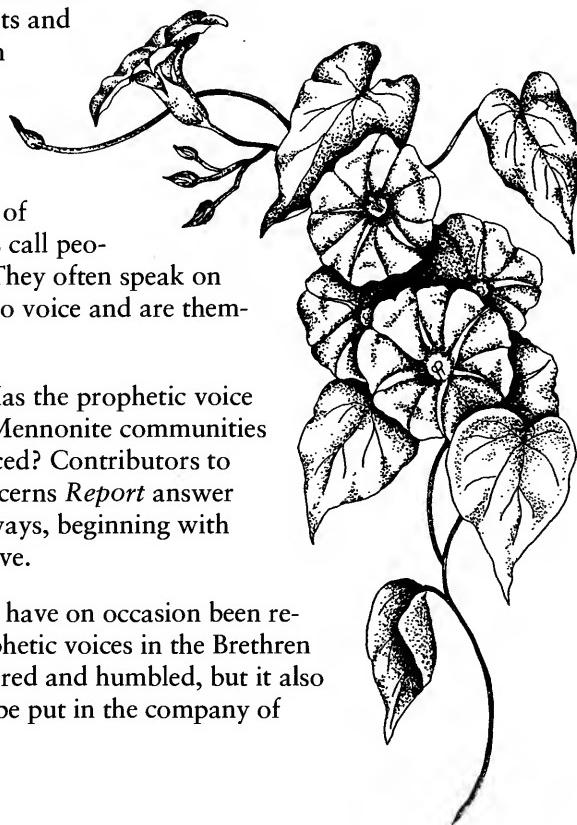
Somewhat to my chagrin, I have on occasion been referred to as one of the prophetic voices in the Brethren in Christ Church. I'm honored and humbled, but it also makes me very nervous to be put in the company of

such undisputed biblical prophets as Deborah, Miriam, Jeremiah, Daniel, Isaiah, John the Baptist and Jesus himself. I want to protest, "If I'm a prophet, then we're in sorry shape!" I feel very ordinary and not especially brave.

Probably the main reason I've been described as a person with a prophetic voice stems from more than 20 years of writing about peace and justice for Brethren in Christ publications. For most of that time, I have edited *Shalom!*, a quarterly BIC publication on peace and social concerns. We have covered most of the tough issues confronting Christians and the church and have tried to stir people out of their comfort zones, to challenge them with the biblical commands to be peacemakers and reconcilers. We have tried to challenge the church to confront oppression and violence, whatever its source.

For a time I also worked for the church as a staff person on the board that carried the peace and justice portfolio. While I was in this position, the denomination embarked on a restructuring process which eliminated the peace and justice staff position (my job) and eventually the board itself. I argued passionately but unsuccessfully in favor of retaining a denominational structure through which much prophetic work had been done on such issues as sexual abuse, militarism, women in ministry and urban ministry. Without such a structure, I, along with some of my colleagues, feared that difficult but crucial issues of peace and justice would be forgotten, diluted or ignored.

About the same time, the MCC U.S. Peace Section board was being dissolved in favor of greater integration of peace and justice ministries into the mainstream of MCC programming in the United States. I was in the odd position of wearing two hats on the Peace Section board—representative from the MCC U.S. board to Peace Section and peace and justice staff person for the Brethren in Christ. I remember very painful discussions around the Peace Section table as people, especially MCC U.S. peace and justice staff, argued passionately but unsuccessfully in favor of retaining the



**For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return there until they have watered the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty; but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and succeed in the thing for which I sent it. (Isaiah 55:10-11, NRSV)**

Peace Section board. Their fear was the same as mine—peace and justice issues would be forgotten, diluted or ignored in favor of a less controversial and more comfortable agenda for MCC.

Several years later, the MCC U.S. board embarked on a restructuring process, one element of which was to move peace and justice staff to regional offices. As a board member, I felt conflicted when I listened to passionate pleas to reverse the plan to decentralize. On the one hand, I remembered what it was like as a denominational staff member when what I believed to be an essential element of faithful Christian witness seemed to be slipping away. On the other hand, as a board member, it was important for me to think about the big picture. Today I chair the board—having moved from my lowly staff position with the Brethren in Christ to a position of some power and influence at MCC. I ask myself, “What has happened to my prophetic voice? Have I sold out?”

I hope not. I know I’ve changed, and I feel some things less passionately than I once did (translation: I’ve mellowed with age!). But there are other things I feel more passionately. I have always assumed that being prophetic, in the biblical tradition, means being out of the mainstream, and I know what that’s like. As a woman in leadership in a denomination that seems still very much a man’s world, and as an outspoken advocate for a renewed commitment to the BIC heritage as a peace church, I sometimes grow weary of living on the margins. Yes, I agree with the prophetic maxim that “it is more important to be faithful than effective,” but I also believe that it is important to be heard. Consequently, much of my struggle has had to do with how I am most likely to be heard. I have probably changed the way I speak and write in an effort to be heard and to be more effective. I hope I have not compromised the message, however.

While I was collecting articles for this edition of *Report*, I chaired my first annual meeting of the MCC U.S. board. We spent a significant portion of the meeting thinking about where we were going as a board and as an organization. Now that we have restructured and the regionalization of program is in process, what will be our priorities for the next five years or so? One issue that emerged from several hours of discussion was the need for MCC U.S. to claim its prophetic role and speak out on

**WOMEN'S CONCERNS REPORT**  
USPS 367-790 is published bimonthly  
by MCC U.S. Women's Concerns,  
Box 500, 21 South 12th St., Akron,  
PA 17501-0500, fax 717-859-3875;  
and by MCC Canada Women's  
Concerns, 50 Kent Avenue, Kitchener,  
ON N2G 3R1; fax 519-745-0064.  
Periodicals postage paid at Akron, PA.  
POSTMASTER: Please send address  
changes to Report, P.O. Box 500,  
Akron, PA 17501-0500.

behalf of the marginalized voices in our society. Board members and staff were reminded of the ways that MCC has frequently taken stands on issues like sexual abuse, racism, poverty and militarism when others were silent. The call came for MCC U.S. not to abandon its prophetic role but to nurture and embrace it.

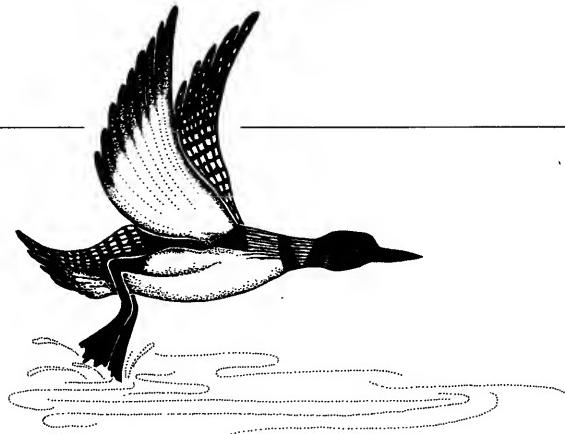
As I reflected on the discussion, I was struck with several things. First, it seems fairly clear that the prophetic voice is alive and well. Despite personal consequences many people continue to speak and write with passion about what God requires. Second, there isn’t one prophetic voice speaking one message. Rather there are often different voices speaking different messages, sometimes contradicting each other. For example, there are voices in the church today calling for differentiated roles for men and women as the way to save the family. There are other voices affirming that God has called and gifted both women and men for ministries at home, in the church and in society. Both sets of voices would probably believe they are being prophetic. Both would probably believe they have the Bible and God on their side.

The contributors to this issue of *Report* illustrate the prophetic voice in different ways. In general, they have not thought of themselves as prophets, but rather have simply followed God’s call on their lives and spoken and acted in ways consistent with that call. Often that has meant being on the margins of the church, being ahead of their time, or being a voice for people who would otherwise have no voice. Sometimes they have endured criticism and further victimization for daring to speak out about uncomfortable subjects. A collection of poetry illustrates that the prophetic voice can often be expressed artistically as well.

So has the prophetic voice been lost or silenced? I don’t think so. Perhaps it has changed, but there are still courageous voices out there that continue to speak the word of the Lord and call people to faithfulness, righteousness and peace.

—*Harriet Sider Bicksler, compiler*

**Harriet Sider Bicksler, Mechanicsburg, Pa., is a publications specialist for a state-funded training institute for children's mental health services. She is secretary of the church board in her congregation, Grantham (Pa.) Brethren in Christ Church. She is married to Dale Bicksler, and they have two young adult children and a new son-in-law.**



**"Sexual abuse destroys lives!  
Why had I not heard? Why did  
I not know there was help and  
hope? Why was it allowed to  
continue, especially in the  
church?"**

by Judith Snowdon

## **Who will listen? Who will hear?**

Who will speak for the children? Who will speak for all who are sexually violated and thrust into a world of dark fear, shame, guilt and helplessness? When God does not cry, "Enough, enough! I will no longer tolerate such unspeakable acts!" who will bear the message? Who will give voice to that which can hardly be named?

To whom would we speak? Who would hear? What institution, what community, what family would want their world pierced by the sharp fragments of the broken lives of victims? Who would want their existence invaded by the penetrating reality of victims' stories? As a child, between the ages of eight and twelve, I was repeatedly sexually molested by a man who attended our church. My father was his pastor. Little was known about sexual abuse in the 1960s, and even though my mother suspected that something improper was happening to me when I went to his house, nothing was ever done about it. I continued to see him. It was our little secret, or so he said.

I have faced many difficulties in my adult life because of the sexual abuse. I coped with many strong negative emotions and felt completely ashamed of even being alive. I managed to bury these feelings in order to survive and live my life, but I always remembered, and I always knew there was something wrong. I married a kind, understanding man and had two wonderful children. I was successful in my work and studies, but there was a huge brokenness that would not go away. At age 38, I began the arduous journey toward healing from the sexual abuse of my childhood.

As I made the first steps by tracing the pain and naming the cause, suddenly the lights came on. Sexual abuse destroys lives! Why had I not heard? Why did I not know there was help and hope? Why was it allowed to continue, especially in the church? I determined that someone had to give voice to the horror. Someone needed to talk about the needs of the victim/survivor and about justice. I thought as a pastor's daughter and pastor's wife, who was also a sur-

## **To a Loon**

Some say the soul's born walking  
and needs God's help to fly

Away from the teaming intimate earth  
into the boundless sky.

I say the soul's born flying  
and needs God's help to land

And every ounce of providence  
to waddle a world of sand.

—Chris Longenecker

**"The middle-aged, middle-class, white, male leadership of the church did not want to learn or understand. They would not listen, and they could not hear."**

vivor, I would have a measure of credibility. I truly felt called to speak out to the church about the issue of sexual abuse.

My passion for the subject gave me the energy to say things that were almost impossible to say. It gave me courage to move beyond myself and speak for those who had no voice. I wrote articles, brochures, booklets. I appeared on Christian TV talk shows, gave interviews and spoke at women's events. For someone who had been ashamed even to exist, this was truly remarkable. I felt a divine strength beyond my own. Yet it was difficult and emotionally draining. Sometimes I thought I could never say the words, "I was sexually abused as a child," one more time.

People listened. Victims thanked me. My story gave others the courage to get help. This was good and wonderful. I was not willing to minimize or trivialize the subject. I talked about justice, about holding offenders accountable, and about supporting victims. I even dared to touch on subjects like righteous anger and the meaning of forgiveness. Some people said I was still angry. Others said I hadn't forgiven my offender. Some even suggested that anything dealing with sexuality should not be talked about in church. Somehow I managed not to take any of this personally.

It became clear to me that people wanted to hear a story of healing, a story of "victory," where no matter what happened, everything ended happily ever after. But for those who are touched by sexual abuse, life is not a fairy tale. The pain is real, and it is a never-ending story with far-reaching ramifications for everyone. I wanted the church to know and understand this.

I believe in the church and its purpose and potential. I wanted my church to become a welcoming, healing



and compassionate community for victims and survivors.

The task of speaking out on sexual abuse was so intricately woven into my path of healing that it is hard to differentiate between the two from my current perspective. I had an empathetic, insightful therapist who worked with me and supported and advised me as I spoke to the church. I think that I was able to maintain objectivity and distance in the task I had undertaken and yet continue to work subjectively on healing my wounds. The two paths become fused into one, however, when I asked my church to help with my healing in a tangible way.

My offender was still alive and attending a church in my denomination. I felt that he must be confronted and held accountable for his actions. I asked for advocacy and mediation. I also felt that the denomination had a responsibility to the children of their clergy who had been wounded in action, so to speak. The offender's pastor saw me as a threat and a problem to his church and treated me as such. He refused to meet with me or communicate with me in any way. He suggested that my memories were the fantasies of a young child. He consulted with lawyers in order to protect himself, his church and the offender from me. A psychiatrist who had never seen or spoken to me said that I was mentally unstable. My abuser's pastor repeatedly insisted that any healing I might need would come from Jesus, and this simply hinged on my willingness to forgive.

My husband and I met with various church leaders, hoping they would intervene to correct this situation. I repeatedly asked for mediation with both my offender and his pastor. This request was ignored. Most of my letters were unanswered. I wanted to illustrate, through my life, how to help and how to treat survivors of sexual abuse. The middle-aged, middle-class, white, male leadership of the church did not want to learn or understand. They would not listen, and they could not hear. They just wanted me to go away. After more than three years of crushing attempts to bring healing and resolution to what had become serious re-victimization and spiritual and emotional abuse, I did just that: I left. I left the church where I had grown up and served all of my life.

**"I do not believe that the prophetic voice has been silenced. If I do not hear it, it is more likely because I am too close to the comfortable center of things, whether in society or in the church."**

I was completely broken. I was in shock. The church allowed me to tell my story of healing but was not willing to participate in the process. They watched from a distance but would not walk with me. The offender's needs and rights received far more consideration than mine. I could be re-victimized, and there was nothing that could be done to bring healing and resolution. I was an annoyance, and I was expendable. How would I live with this reality for the rest of my life?

The only way to move on was to leave everything behind and embrace new things that were good and healing. I accepted a job as a church musician in a large mainline church. I was nurtured and affirmed in this community. I spent time composing and expressing my experiences and my feelings through music. I read and wrote about women in the Bible and interpreted their stories through the eyes of a marginalized, victimized woman. I saw that I was not alone. I began to see the gospel with new eyes. I saw Jesus as a compassionate man who was in solidarity with those who were wounded, with women, children and even Gentiles. Yet he too was abused by the religious community of his time, even to the point of death. Once again I saw that I was not alone. I drew comfort and strength from this. Slowly the pieces of our lives fell back together. Slowly I recovered and gained confidence and strength.

I still speak and write about sexual abuse whenever the opportunity arises. It is never easy, but I remain committed to what I believe I have been called to do. I do not take this task lightly. I am acutely aware of the ignorance that prevails and the utter refusal of many to learn. Somehow, some way, someone must speak on behalf of the most powerless in our society and in our church—those children whose lives are so tragically shaped and molded by evil. I am determined to tell my story to those who will listen and to those who will hear. "Our little secret" will no longer be shrouded in shame, but exposed to the healing light of God's love and God's truth.

**Judith Snowdon is a piano teacher, composer and church musician. This summer she and her husband will move to eastern Canada where they will share the positions of Eastern Canada director and Maritime representative for Mennonite Central Committee Canada.**

by Nancy Heisey

## **The prophetic voice is alive and well**

As a younger woman, I felt that I was part of a church where the voices of prophets were respected, even welcomed in our midst. I suspect this understanding had to do with the times—a large popular movement opposed the U.S.-sponsored war in Vietnam. Shortly thereafter, during a period of relative prosperity for citizens of the United States and Canada, came the "world food crisis" of the 1970s. In response, Mennonite Central Committee passed the "Hillsboro Resolution," calling for a concerted Anabaptist Christian response to the problem of hunger and including commitments to sharing resources from the United States and Canada, better programs for enhancing food security in other parts of the world, and changing North American standards of living so that we would have more to share with people in need. In the wake of this upswing of enthusiasm came Doris Janzen Longacre's *More With Less Cookbook*. Its call for both simplicity and celebration has continued to reach people around the world for a quarter century since its first publication.

Many things have changed since the 1970s. The United States has been going through a social upheaval that is both diffused and unmistakable. (I cannot speak for Canada, so what follows should be understood as the reflections of a U.S. citizen.) Some spokespersons describe what is happening as a call to return to traditional values. Does this movement represent the descriptions of right living and right relationships that shaped prophetic messages in the biblical tradition? I don't think so.

Rather in the past 20 years, the leaders of our society, with the overt permission or lack of attention of ordinary citizens, have legislated harsher treatment for the poor; mightily resisted efforts to control trafficking in guns, making ours the most violent society in the world; worked to dismantle environmental protections; refused to deal with the fact that 40 million of our fellow citizens not only do not have adequate health coverage, but also

**"In the midst of these changes, those who speak clearly and prophetically have been kept resolutely at the margins of church institutions, if they have not been silenced completely, out of fear for the ramifications of their prophetic word."**

have no coverage at all; and authorized spending billions of dollars on weapons to bully the world into submission. During these years, our society has also imprisoned nearly two million of our own citizens, many of whom are people of color. (In the year 2000, the United States with five percent of the world's population will have 25 percent of the world's prisoners, according to Jason Ziedenberg of the Justice Policy Institute. See William Raspberry, "2 Million and Counting," *Washington Post*, Dec. 13, 1999, A22.)

The collapse of the Soviet Union ten years ago and the resulting rush for all the world's leaders to jump on the global capitalist bandwagon has created a frenzy of marketing and trading practices which have led to ever greater gaps between the very few rich and the vast majority of very poor residents on our common planet. The complexity of the forces of globalization shaping life on our planet make "straightforward" causes such as ending the Vietnam War and world hunger seem like child's play.

Certainly, Anabaptists and other Christians have joined others in continuing to speak and work at alternatives, ways that are faithful to the life and teachings of Jesus in this strange new world which we are only beginning to understand. But too often our attention has been diverted by questions I believe avoid the deep and terrible realities of our society, distracting us from the need to confront the powers that turn us away from following Jesus. In the midst of these changes, those who speak clearly and prophetically have been kept resolutely at the margins of church institutions, if they have not been silenced completely, out of fear for the ramifications of their prophetic word.

While reflecting on these matters, I stopped one day to look at the daily newspapers. The *Washington Post* doesn't always get my full attention, but on this particular day I found two articles that prodded me into further reflection. First was a review of the book *No Future Without Forgiveness* by Archbishop Desmond Tutu of South Africa. Referring to Tutu's role as head of South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission, the

reviewer notes the commission's decision to recommend "conditional amnesty in exchange for a full disclosure of crimes" such as "torture, abductions, rapes and murders," during the apartheid years. She adds: "Most controversial for many readers will be Tutu's advocacy of forgiveness, of 'abandoning your right to pay back the perpetrator in his own coin.' . . . (Tutu) recognizes. . . that forgiveness cannot be mandated by any court or commission. . . . Tutu's answer derives in part from his religious conviction, in part from having witnessed countless examples of how genuine forgiveness restores human dignity." (Sissela Bok, "From Archbishop Tutu, Why It Pays to Forgive," *Washington Post*, Dec. 22, 1999: C2.)

This review reminded me how thankful I am, both for books such as Tutu's and for the insight of the reviewers who made the effort to bring them to the attention of a wider audience. On the *Post's* editorial page, I received yet another jolt about the nature of the prophetic voice in our own time. Here columnist Molly Ivins discusses a recent statement by presidential candidate George W. Bush, that Christ was his "favorite political philosopher." Ivins decides to take Bush "at his word that Jesus Christ changed his heart," by posing nine questions about his choices as governor of Texas. Among them, she asks: "Why have you signed more than 100 death warrants—



**"The prophetic voice is heard among believers in other parts of the world—those who have stared directly into the face of the greatest evils human society can engender."**

including those of people who were clearly insane or profoundly retarded, and including that of Karla Faye Tucker, whose heart was also changed by Jesus Christ and who was a walk-the-walk Christian?" (Molly Ivins, "A Christian Candidate," *Washington Post*, Dec. 22, 1999: A33.)

Musing further, I concluded that the problem has been my perception that being prophetic would ever be easy or popular. Certainly, moments come when people's movements make visible in history humanity's deep God-given desires for justice and peace. Without doubt at times particular voices ring out clearly with messages that many are willing to support and work for. But more often the story of prophets has been one of loneliness and being ignored at best and being persecuted or put to death at worst.

Living prophetically is a hard, life-long process. I do not believe that the prophetic voice has been silenced. If I do not hear it, it is more likely because I am too close to the comfortable center of things, whether in society or in the church.

The prophetic voice is heard among those who have continued to call the church from our own margins, bearing the lack of interest or even the opprobrium coming from the institutional center. It is heard among believers in other parts of the world—those who have stared directly into the face of the greatest evils human society can engender and chosen to keep their hands in the business of change while retaining their faith. It sometimes comes from those who do not even claim an identity within the community of faith, but who look carefully at who Jesus is and what he says, wondering whether we who claim his name will ever get around to truly taking Jesus seriously?

**Nancy R. Heisey, Harrisonburg, Va., is instructor in biblical studies and church history at Eastern Mennonite University. She considers herself a friend of several prophets within the Mennonite family of churches.**

by Mary Jane Davis as told to Harriet Sider Bicksler

## **The prophetic and feminine face of God**

*I came to the Brethren in Christ Church from a denomination where to this day women are not permitted to hold offices in the church, are not delegates, cannot vote at council or conference, and cannot pursue the pastoral ministry. For me "women in ministry" was a non-issue.*

*I began my adult Christian journey at the Palmyra Brethren in Christ Church in the summer of 1971. During the 1970s, I enjoyed participating in "acceptable teaching roles"—Sunday school, clubs, and youth programs. It wasn't until 1981 when I was divorced and a single parent, that I was asked to chair the Board of Christian Education, thus making me a member of the church board.*

*At that point, I needed to personally confront the barrier I had always thought was there for the Christian woman—women were not to be in leadership in the church, especially in decision-making roles. The tension was great for me because during the previous months I had been praying for God to open doors in my life, either in my job or at church, where I could feel some fulfillment and satisfaction. Here was an open door. I had recognized my leadership abilities in my work with the refugee task force. My background in teaching and curriculum development seemed a natural for Christian education. Yet dare I? Would people respect me with what had happened in my life? What were God's plans? I turned to God in prayer actually hoping that the answer would be something as great as writing on the wall. In the next week or so, God gave me a writing; it wasn't on the wall but rather in Psalm 16.*

*As I read the passage over and over, I heard God saying, "I have made your lot secure, I am setting your boundary lines in pleasant places. I am at your right hand; don't be shaken." With this assurance from God, I began my journey in ministry.*

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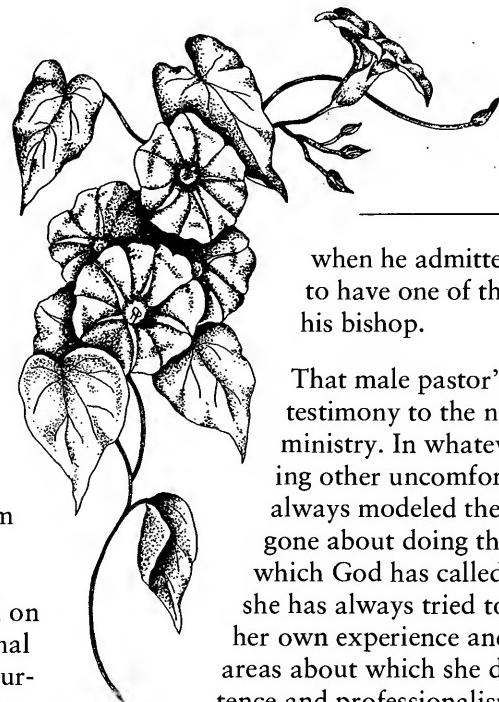
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So begins Mary Jane Davis' testimony of how God led her into ministry in the church. Her journey as a woman in ministry eventually took her from lay positions at the Palmyra church to becoming the director of Christian education at the Grantham (Pa.) Brethren in Christ Church where she was the first woman on the pastoral staff. She has been at the Grantham church since 1984, where she continues to follow the call of God and the church into ordained Christian ministry. She has served on the denominational Board for Congregational Life and the Board of Administration and currently serves on the Commission on Ministry and Doctrine. At the Grantham church, she is the pastor of congregational care.

Mary Jane is also one of my pastors and has been a good friend ever since she came to Grantham. Recently we sat down together to talk about the question, "Whatever happened to the prophetic voice?" as it relates to women in ministry in the Brethren in Christ Church.

When I asked her whether she ever perceived herself as a prophetic voice on the issue of women in ministry, she was quick to say no. But she was also just as quick to acknowledge that her position as one of the first women to be ordained in the Brethren in Christ Church (still a relatively small number) makes her somewhat prophetic.

She remembers a man once telling her that women in ministry would be received more positively if they weren't so aggressive. At various pastors' retreats in her regional conference, she and another female pastor would often be considered more a part of the group of pastors' wives than integral members of the conference pastoral team. We both remember once being on a denominational task force on women in ministry where a male pastor at first railed against what he called "unbridled feminism." (What mental images came to mind!) At the end of the meeting we felt we had achieved a significant victory



when he admitted he could become willing to have one of the women in attendance be his bishop.

That male pastor's admission is in many ways a testimony to the nature of Mary Jane's prophetic ministry. In whatever setting she has been, including other uncomfortable encounters, Mary Jane has always modeled the gentle approach and has simply gone about doing the work she is gifted for and to which God has called her. She also emphasizes that she has always tried to stay within the boundaries of her own experience and training, not venturing into areas about which she doesn't know much. Her competence and professionalism have won people over many times, despite their previous philosophical or theological oppositions to women in ministry.

Mary Jane has felt both the burden and blessing of knowing that younger women are watching her, that they see her as a role model. She tells the story of one young girl in the Grantham church who was born the year Mary Jane came to the church. One time when the family was visiting another church while on vacation, Lynne turned to her mother and asked, "Where's Mary Jane?" Her mother reminded her that MJ was at home in Grantham, only to realize that what Lynne meant was there was no woman up front in that church. They didn't have a Mary Jane! Lynne had grown up with women in the pulpit and didn't know anything else. For her it was perfectly natural and right.

As Mary Jane and I talked about her ministry in particular and women in ministry in general in the Brethren in Christ Church, we reflected specifically on the last 10 years. In the early 1990s, the issue became one the church could no longer ignore. It was an exciting time for women as grass-roots forums, dialogue sessions and retreats were held. Men and women came together to pray, discuss and discern the Lord's will; resolutions affirming women in ministry and leadership were approved by the General Conference; and bishops and church leaders gave intentional support to women who felt God's call to ministry. Although there was always opposition along with genuine disagreement about what the Bible teaches about women's roles in the church, the

**"I can no longer question my calling; I must obey God's boundaries."**

church officially affirmed its belief that the Bible supports women in ministry at all levels of church life.

Since that time, it feels like progress has slowed. Mary Jane identified a number of factors that may account for this, as well as some of the challenges we still face: 1) The leadership structure of the church has changed, and no one in leadership at this time carries this specific agenda. In the early 1990s, there was a board dedicated to social concerns that provided a structure for grassroots activism to work its way up through the church to the General Conference level. Now, because of a down-sized board and leadership structure, no one seems to have time, energy or passion to devote to the issue. 2) In order to be heard, women's voices still need to be accompanied, reinforced and validated by male voices. On the one hand, such partnership between women and men is vital. On the other hand, it continues to feel like women's voices are not equally respected and women still need men to validate them. This is demeaning, even when it is not intended to be. 3) Most of the support for women in ministry, in Mary Jane's experience, comes from older people. The generation coming after us appears to be more socially conservative. What this means for the future is unknown, but it is cause for concern. 4) In the Brethren in Christ Church, only a limited number of congregations are willing to bring women on staff.

Mary Jane's own daughter, a recent college graduate with a degree in youth ministries, was told by a bishop that there were no openings. He suggested she look for overseas mission work instead. What he must have meant, since there have been youth pastor openings, was that there was no church with an opening that would be willing to accept a woman. At the same time, another bishop recently asked Mary Jane for information about women in ministry to share with congregations in his conference.

Mary Jane's story, with which I began, ends before she was ordained. As she anticipated her ordination, she said: *I can no longer question my calling; I must obey God's boundaries. I do this with the knowledge and promise that the Lord is at my right hand and I need not be*

*shaken. He continues to make the path of life known to me, and although the future is unknown and where that will lead is sometimes frightening, I am rejoicing in God's presence in my life and in the people he has used to help me hear him more clearly.*

Although Mary Jane never set out to be prophetic, she agrees that her ministry is in fact prophetic in the way it continually reminds people that God is neither male nor female, despite the fact that we often continue to imagine God as primarily male. Recognizing that pastors often represent God and Jesus to people, especially at crucial times in their lives, she knows that she models the feminine face of God for the people she serves. As a woman in a pastoral role, she quietly but intentionally emphasizes her firm conviction that effective ministry recognizes not only that men and women have different gifts and different needs but also that God uses both men and women to be the face and voice of God in the world.

**Mary Jane Davis is minister of congregational care at the Grantham (Pa.) Brethren in Christ Church and the mother of two young adult daughters. The italicized excerpts from the story of her journey in ministry were reprinted from the Fall 1991 issue of *Shalom! A Journal for the Practice of Reconciliation*, a quarterly Brethren in Christ publication on peace and social concerns. The rest of the article is based on a recent conversation between Mary Jane and Harriet Sider Bicksler.**

***And Your Daughters Shall Prophesy: You Shall Be my Witnesses,*** a conference of the Evangelical & Ecumenical Women's Caucus, will be held July 27-30, 2000 at North Park University, Chicago, Ill. A gathering of committed and inclusive Christian feminists, this conference celebrates and welcomes the prophetic voice, featuring such women prophets as Sister Joan Chittister, an author and lecturer, Karen Thompson, an educator and community activist, and Reta Finger, a New Testament scholar.

For registration and other information, contact Arlynne Ostlund at [arlynneo@aol.com](mailto:arlynneo@aol.com) or call 847-825-5651.

**"When the light of revelation shines too brightly, showing the chinks and cracks in the way we've always done it, then we try to turn it off or shut it out."**

by Melanie Zuercher

## Shutting out the prophetic light

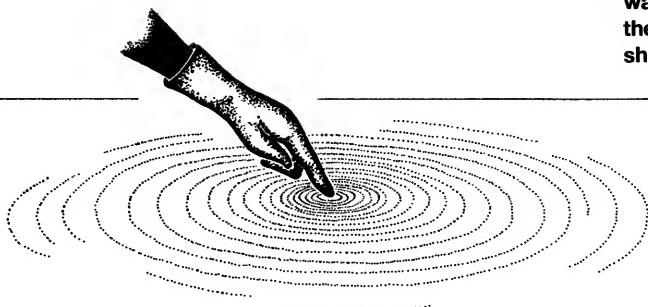
When I was young, I wrote stories to amuse myself. As a teenager, I had poetry published in *With* magazine and the occasional odd newsletter. But until I got to college, it never occurred to me that writing might be what I was supposed to do with my life.

I worked on the staff of the Goshen (Ind.) College *Record* in some capacity all four years I attended there. The fall of my senior year, I was the editor-in-chief of the weekly, eight- to 12-page paper.

Looking back over the front pages of those issues, I see that it must have been one of the more memorable fall trimesters. It was 1982. Between September and December, two female professors died of cancer (one of them completely unexpectedly), a group from the community picketed the college because of the visit of anti-nuclear activist Helen Caldicott, a Goshen College student was convicted in a Cleveland court for failure (or refusal) to register for the draft, and a popular college president announced his retirement.

If any one issue dominated my editorials, it was Mark Schmucker's trial, which I attended as part of a group of supportive students and faculty. This was the first time in my life I was faced with the consequences of obeying a higher law than that of an earthly government. Although I wince today at some of what I wrote, I still feel that the editorial I published immediately after Mark's conviction was one of my best pieces of college writing.

What was perhaps more important, though, was that I began to understand what it meant to be part of a prophetic people—a group who by their religious beliefs "spoke truth to power." Literally, Mark Schmucker and his parents, all of them quiet people, had very little to say.



But Mark had made a decision. He was determined to stick to it, come what might, and his family supported him. To me that echoed louder than any of the lawyers' or the judge's eloquence. At that moment, I was proud to be a Mennonite.

Something more profoundly disturbing happened at the end of the trimester, however. It had nothing to do with Mark Schmucker, draft registration or civil disobedience. In our last issue of the fall, the *Record* ran a story about Goshen president J. Lawrence Burkholder's announcement that he would retire at the end of his current term. We included information about the college board of overseers putting together a presidential search committee.

I can't remember the details any more. But what I do see, in my final editorial, is that I wrote about being asked not to print something concerning the search committee process. We printed it anyway, whatever it was, and the sky did not fall in. The *Record* still exists, and presidential search processes continue in their time. Back then, I titled the editorial "Can a (Mennonite) writer be a servant?" Reading it today, I think perhaps it should have been "Can a (Mennonite) writer be a prophet?" I recognize something I didn't know then—the double edge of Mennonite quietness.

We are a people historically marked by a steady and largely silent adherence to our convictions—Mennonites don't talk much about what we believe, we just do it. We show up at disasters. We put together hundreds of thousands of relief kits. We sew in church basements and put the quilts and comforters on charity auction blocks. We are both pleased and uneasy with the "noisy faithful" among us—the Christian Peacemaker Team members, the School of the Americas demonstrators, and those who confront the political powers in Ottawa and Washington.

**"Whatever happened to the  
Mennonite prophetic voice?  
It's still there, in the voices of  
the artists and writers."**

The shadow side of our quiet discipleship is this: we frequently suppress, or try to, the voices that might send discomforting ripples across the surface of our tranquil pond. The artists among us know the touch of this glove all too well. Traditionally, they have had to go outside the church and Mennonite community to share their visions through such media as poetry, fiction, dance and visual arts. Many of them have been literally shunned or silenced by their communities of origin. At the very least, they sense they are not trusted there.

We think of our artists as being our prophets. A look in the dictionary at the word "prophet" yields a number of definitions that all involve communicating in some way—words like "speak," "teach," "revelation" and "inspiration." Although we don't usually put journalists on the same platform as artists, in this context journalists can also be prophets. Certainly, they are often known—in fact, sometimes notorious—for what they "reveal."

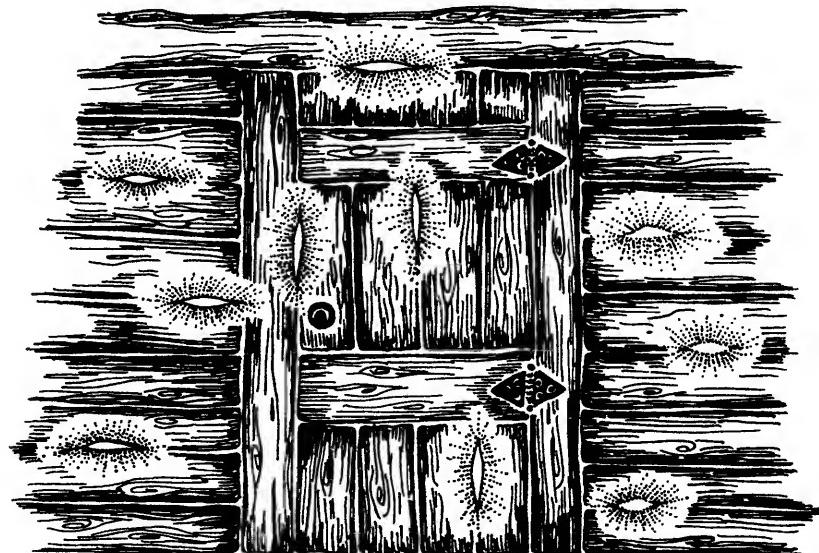
And when the light of revelation shines too brightly, showing the chinks and cracks in "the way we've always done it" or "how things have always been," then we try to turn it off or shut it out. Draw the curtains or close the door which makes it seem as if the light isn't there. Perhaps stop feeding the fire or cut off the electricity. There are plenty of apt metaphors.

Mennonite artists know what this is like. And so does this journalist. I learned a lesson at the beginning of my writing career that is only now becoming clear. You can be marked as prophetic both by what you say and by what you are not allowed to say. My writing for Mennonite periodicals over the last five years has covered a vast range of topics. One thing I have regularly returned to, however, is the (Mennonite) church's treatment of its gay and lesbian children. Sometimes this has taken the form of news, other times of editorial writing. And I believe I have paid a price for that.

Whatever happened to the Mennonite prophetic voice? It's still there, in the voices of the artists and writers. It's on our college campuses. The Bible tells about both old and young dreaming dreams, seeing visions and prophesying, and some of our elders still speak a clear, unflinching truth as well. But I wonder if most of it has simply died away for weariness—gone to where it seems as if truth still has power to move, to change and to transform.

Yet remember the words of the gospel writer, John: "The light shines in darkness and the darkness has not overcome it." Whether we feel its warmth or not, the light is still there.

**Melanie Zuercher lives in Hesston, Kan., and is news service editor for the General Conference Mennonite Church.**





## The Embrace

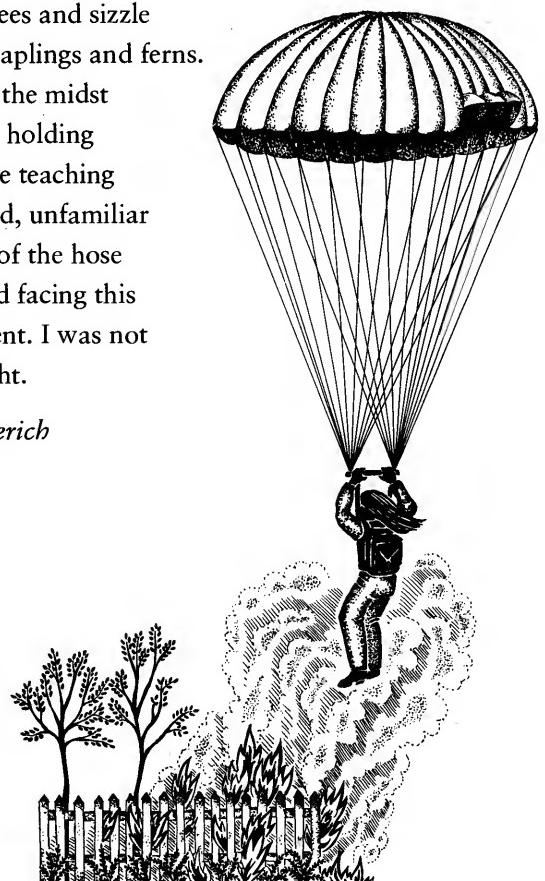
Brazenly they embraced  
out in the open for all  
to see and it did not  
happen quickly, or for warmth,  
it lasted longer than eyes could  
gaze without turning away, for  
hours, days, years, until I could not  
imagine one without the other  
—the sycamore and rock—  
entwined by the river.

—Ruth Ann Meyers Kulp

## Friendship on Fire

Your promise is chaos  
like the wildfires  
of the West and this  
is not my true profession,  
fire jumping. I come to it  
like those in 1W, thinking  
this the alternative to war.  
But the battle has come.  
Blazing through white  
picket fences and embellished  
lawns. I stomp the flames  
at my feet. I douse them  
with water but their will  
is rampant. And I don't  
know how to stand aside,  
let it burn to the heights  
of the tallest trees and sizzle  
at the base of saplings and ferns.  
I dropped into the midst  
of these flames holding  
confident to the teaching  
that love is kind, unfamiliar  
with the skills of the hose  
or hatchet. And facing this  
fire, it's apparent. I was not  
raised for a fight.

—Debra Gingerich

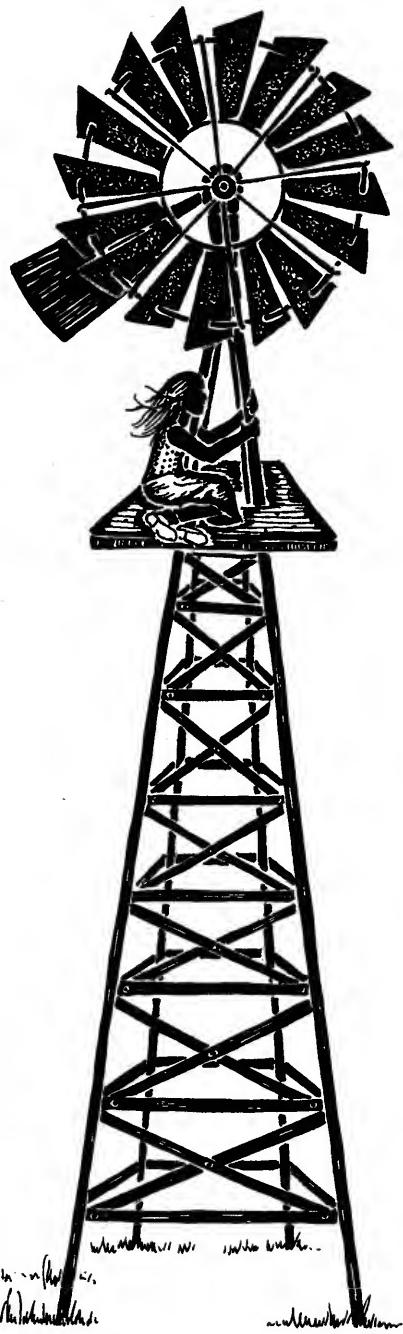


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## Thinking of Certain Mennonite Women

When I think I can't bear to trace  
one more sorrow back to its source,  
  
I think of Lois those summer evenings,  
when, supper dishes done, she'd climb  
  
a windmill and cling beneath its great blades,  
drawing water from under her father's fields.  
  
She'd stay there until the sun went down  
on barn roof, garden, and the one paved road  
  
pointing toward town. When I am afraid  
to set out once more alone, I see Julie  
  
pumping her legs so hard she believes  
she will fly off the swing set and land  
  
gently on the lawn. I see her let go,  
braids streaking behind, then see her knees  
  
shredded on gravel, stuck to stockings  
each time she kneels to pray at a pew.  
  
When I can't tell my own desire  
from the wishes of others, I remember  
  
my mom, too young to know or care better,  
flinging her jumper, blouse, socks, and slip  
  
into the wind, dancing for flower beds  
until her mother discovers. When I wonder  
  
how I should live this only one life,  
I think of how they tell these stories:  
  
honestly, without explanation,  
to whomever will listen.

—Julia Kasdorf



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**"The life of the prophet was not a happy one because usually the messages she or he had to convey challenged the existing status quo and prevailing ideologies, thereby inviting ridicule and ostracism."**

by Wilma Ann Bailey

## The prophetic voice in the Bible

A prophet is one "who serves as a channel of communication between the human and divine worlds" (Wilson, 826). A prophet does not speak for herself. She speaks in the name of the Divine. In the Bible, prophetic pronouncements usually, though not always, consist of a description of the current situation, a statement known in scholarly circles as the messenger formula ("Thus says the Lord"), and a statement of what the outcome will be (Westermann, 130). The message of the prophet was to the people of her time, not the distant future.

Not all prophets were called to a life-long vocation as prophet. Some, such as Amos, were called in the midst of another vocation to speak God's word (Amos 7:14). The life of the prophet was not a happy one because usually the messages she or he had to convey challenged the existing status quo and prevailing ideologies, thereby inviting ridicule and ostracism. Although Isaiah volunteered for the job (Isaiah 6:8), most would have preferred to let someone else do it (Jeremiah 20:7-12).

Though muted, the prophetic voice of women is heard in the Bible. A number of women—Miriam (Exodus 15:20), Deborah (Judges 4:4), Huldah (2 Kings 22:14), Noadiah (Nehemiah 6:14), Anna (Luke 2:36), and Isaiah's wife (Isaiah 8:3)—are specifically identified as prophets in the biblical text itself. A woman named Jezebel was said to have called herself a prophet in Revelation 2:20. (See also Ezekiel 13:17). Moreover, the book of Acts indicates that the four daughters of Philip prophesied (Acts 21:9). We know they were not alone.

The prophet Joel, for example, envisions a day when normalcy is restored and both sons and daughters will prophesy (Joel 2:28). According to the author of Acts, that day arrived with the pouring out of the Holy Spirit on the first Pentecost (Acts 2:17). Paul also assumes that

women function in a prophetic role in the church (1 Cor 11:5). The best remembered words of prophecy uttered by a woman, however, emerge from the mouth of one who is not called a prophet at all—Hannah, the mother of Samuel.

What did these women prophets say? Deborah, a pre-monarchic prophet, received a word from God asking her to inform Barak, an Israelite army commander, that he was to lead two of the tribes of Israel into battle against Sisera and the army of Hazor. When Barak balked, refusing to go unless Deborah went with him, she agreed to accompany him. But, she warned him, God would give the victory to a woman. The woman turned out to be Jael who slaughtered the unsuspecting Sisera when he fell asleep in her tent (Judges 4-5).

Huldah was a prophet who ministered during the latter years of the Judahite monarchy during the reign of the good king, Josiah. She, like most other biblical prophets, delivered a message of doom and destruction. During renovations to the temple in Jerusalem a scroll was found. When the king heard the words written on the scroll, he was horrified because he knew that the people were not living in conformity to the words of the text. Before he instituted change, however, he wanted to make sure that the scroll was authentic and represented the word of God to them. King Josiah sent a delegation to Huldah, asking her to authenticate the scroll. She did so and proclaimed that disaster would come upon the Israelite kingdom because the people had abandoned God in favor of the practice of idolatry. She assured Josiah that he would die in peace because he had repented of his own wrongdoing. The message of doom would be realized, but in another generation. Huldah's words were not special to women. She addressed the king of Israel and the people in general. Her words were quite in keeping with the prophetic pronouncements of the Deuteronomistic Historian—the composite writer of the books of Joshua-Kings, exclusive of Ruth (2 Kings 22:3-20).

Hannah delivered her prophecy in the form of a prayer upon the birth of her firstborn son. This prayer was probably the model for the praise song uttered by Mary on the birth of her firstborn son (Luke 1:46-55). After a long period of childlessness, Hannah rejoiced because she had become the mother of a son. As with most of the children born after a period of childlessness, she recognized that



this was a special child who would play a significant role in the life of the Israelite people. Hannah envisioned a time of upheaval in the social structures of her day, resulting in empowerment of the poor and needy and divestiture of power from the rich and high born: "The bows of the mighty are broken, but the feeble gird on strength. Those who are full have hired themselves out for bread, but those who were hungry are fat with spoil. The barren has borne seven, but she who has many children is forlorn" (1 Sam 2:4–5 NRSV).

Although many try to personalize this prophetic poem and limit it to the occasion of the birth of a child, the use of martial language and references to the social structure indicate that Hannah is referring to more than her specific situation. New Testament scholar, Cain Hope Felder, writes that when Mary appropriated Hannah's song and molded it into her own, she became "a paradigm for the socially concerned female" (Felder, 143). That Hannah and Mary were not just expressing their own words but conveying a message from God can been seen in the fact that their words are quite consistent in theme and content with those of the great Israelite prophets, Isaiah and Amos.

Although only a very few words of the female prophets have been preserved, we know there were female prophets and they did speak. Like their male counterparts, they perhaps were not always heard, but someone thought the memory of these women and what they had to say was worth recording. Hence they are part of the biblical record today.

**Wilma Ann Bailey** is associate professor of biblical studies and religion at Messiah College, Grantham, Pa. She attends Locust Lane Mennonite Church in Harrisburg. Her special interests are social justice, peace, African American and women's issues.

"It struck me as incongruous that I was free to preach to national children and my missionary colleagues but not to the adult congregation."

by Dorothy Gish

## Two pioneer women prophets

I was recently studying Frances Davidson's diaries. She clearly served as a prophetic voice in her day. As I perused her diaries, I also found much with which I could identify. Indeed, I was startled by the many similarities between her life and mine.

Born into a preacher's family in 1860, she was the first Brethren in Christ person to earn a graduate degree. After several years of college teaching, she became the denomination's first missionary candidate. Her clear criteria for the site of the first mission conflicted with that of the less-focused male leader. Fortunately, her vision ultimately won and a pioneer mission was established in Southern Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe).

Even though her diaries record continuing frustrations with men who were threatened by her competence, she was always charitable in her comments about them. Five years after they had established the mission, she resigned out of frustration with the male leaders who were slow or even unwilling to do what she clearly saw needed to be done. Devastated by the mission board's refusal to accept her resignation, she spent an afternoon alone in self-searching prayer. Determined "to leave everything in the Lord's hands," she continued three more years until the end of her term.

After a furlough in the States, she returned to Africa. Despite the absence of a male missionary and against the advice of both missionary and local government officials, Francis and another intrepid woman proceeded to Northern Rhodesia (now Zambia). While learning the language, they established a mission school and farm that later received the highest commendation from a mission board representative.

Sixteen years later with the work well established and thriving, the all-male missionary executive committee decided "that I had taken the place of a man long enough and the time had come for me to be in subjection."

continued on page 16

**"When people express appreciation for my 'speech,' I thank them recognizing that such verbal gymnastics enable them to hear a woman preaching."**

Deeply wounded by what she felt were unfair accusations and noting that as a faculty member she had worked with men as an equal, her diary reveals both a gracious spirit towards these men and a thorough self-examination. She wisely discerned that because of her command of the language and her warm relationships with the people, it was not feasible to stay on under the leadership of a neophyte male missionary who knew neither language nor culture. Though it was an agonizing decision, she left Africa. A year later she accepted a thrice-made request to teach at Messiah Bible College in Grantham, Pennsylvania.

Frances Davidson's diaries also show that her attitude about women preaching changed. Believing a woman out of place in the pulpit, she shrank from requests for speaking that accompanied her preparation for Africa. Finally, she agreed to talk if her presentation was always followed by a message from the minister. Given the success of these first public speaking experiences, she later pondered if she should have been "so loth to speak." Upon the approval of her male colleague, she accepted an invitation to lead evangelistic services shortly after arriving in Africa. After the mission was established, most of the preaching fell to her because of her grasp of the local language. She wasn't always comfortable with this, but noted that "sometimes the Lord gave me a message."

During furlough she readily accepted speaking requests. Her messages were blessed with a relatively large amount of money raised for missions. A senior church official once invited her to take part in communion services, asking whether she did not feel called to preach. "Of course, I said that I could not but sometimes I wonder what it all meant." She ordinarily did most of the preaching at the mission she founded. However, once at a service with several missionary men present she expected to keep quiet. When they said nothing, she prayed, "Lord what does this mean? Do you want me to speak?" She immediately received a message which she gave. "It was as unexpected to me as to any one. But all had to acknowledge it was of the Lord for me to

speak." She eventually concluded that she should speak in whatever avenues were opened to her.

Like Frances, I was the only one in my family to pursue higher education. Thirty-six years after she left Africa, I became headmistress at the school she established. During my six and a half years of continuous service there, a male was always in charge. Even though my colleagues were more accepting than Frances' seem to have been, it was frustrating to wait for males to make the decisions (and sometimes issue edicts). Although I was sometimes disturbed by the behavior of some women and the lesser competence of some men, I do not remember questioning the right of males to be in charge. On the other hand, I wasn't troubled by the fact that as headmistress I was in charge of male teachers. One of my greatest joys when I left was to pass the position to a national women even though there were males on staff.

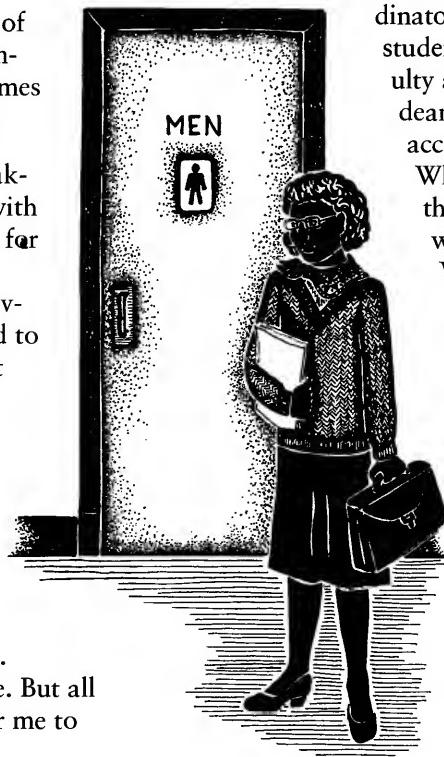
Like Frances, I have found greater acceptance of my gifts in academia than in the church. Reviewing my three decades in higher education, I realize that administration has been

part of every assignment. From lab school coordinator to department chair to acting dean of students to assistant and associate dean of faculty and finally, through various academic dean and vice president titles, all were accepted in response to unsought invitations.

When I was academic dean, a good sister in the church told me that she thought it was wrong for me to be in authority over men. When I was deciding whether or not to accept the chief academic officer role, each vice president individually affirmed me and pledged their support. At administrative meetings my input carried equal weight with theirs.

Nevertheless, I frequently reminded them of important men's bathroom decision-making discussions from which I was automatically excluded.

Crisis situations prevailed when I came to the chief administrative office in student life and in academics. My greatest satisfaction comes from having steered each through those diffi-



**"Rather than having an extraordinary calling to utter profound truth, being a prophetic voice is probably continuing to exercise one's gifts and duties in the ordinary as well as extraordinary events of life. To that God calls each of us."**

cult times and provided leadership for their continuing development. Nevertheless, I suspect that instead of focusing on such accomplishments, history will primarily reflect my being the first woman in senior administration at Messiah College.

Before I was a teenager, I was asked to work with young children in Sunday school. Likely a ploy to channel my hyperactivity, it provided an opportunity to learn valuable skills. By age 16, I was in charge of our congregation's vacation Bible school. That, along with young people's meetings, provided my first public speaking venues. Having grown up in the same tradition as Frances Davidson, it seemed a given that only men were preachers. I nevertheless felt no qualms about speaking from the pulpit as I was preparing to leave for missionary service. In Africa, all missionaries took turns speaking at our mid-week prayer meetings. However, only the missionary men and male nationals preached in the church. A national male colleague and I worked together to implement his vision for children's church. It struck me as incongruous that I was free to preach to national children and my missionary colleagues but not to the adult congregation.

Over the years, Bible study has convinced me that God gives both men and women gifts and holds each accountable to exercise those gifts obediently and faithfully. Thus I have accepted invitations to speak in many places and a wide variety of venues including preaching Sunday morning sermons, delivering a General Conference sermon, and giving a wedding homily. When people express appreciation for my "speech," I thank them recognizing that such verbal gymnastics enable them to hear a woman preaching.

Frances Davidson probably did not view herself as a prophetic voice. Nor do I. But we both attempted to obey God even when it meant taking risks or being stretched beyond our comfort zones. Rather than having an extraordinary calling to utter profound truth, being a prophetic voice is probably continuing to exercise one's gifts and duties in the ordinary as well as extraordinary events of life. To that God calls each of us.

**Dorothy Gish is retired from various teaching and administrative positions at Messiah College, Grantham, Pa. She enjoys traveling and volunteers her time on many nonprofit boards. She chairs the board of directors for Messiah Village, a Brethren in Christ retirement center. She is a member of the Carlisle (Pa.) Brethren in Christ Church.**

by Dorothy Friesen

## **Prophetic voice: Different tones for different decades?**

*December 4, 1999. I stand in the street among a motley group of young and old and clutch my red candle in front of a newly constructed brick two-flat on the West Side of Chicago. We are here in the drizzle to publicly remember the state assassination of two Black Panther leaders 30 years ago. On December 4, 1969, at 4:30 a.m., FBI agents and police under the direction of Illinois State's attorney general, Edward Hanrahan, rained bullets from submachine guns, automatic rifles, shotguns and hand guns into the house on this site. It took 10 years of struggle and court battles to establish that this was murder, not a shoot-out as Hanrahan's office insisted.*

*A young man in dreads at the microphone says the government assault on the African American community continues today, this time with drugs. He calls for action, for reparations, for justice, for the aging ex-Panthers and all people of goodwill to get involved. His words spur me to reflect on what has changed in the past 30 years in the society, in the world and in me.*

I came to Chicago as an eager young seminary student in 1972. The country was in the throes of the Vietnam War and reeling from the assassinations of John and Robert Kennedy, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., and Malcolm X. There was anger in the Chicago air, stemming from the police brutality at the Democratic Convention and Mayor Daley's "shoot to kill" order during the West Side uprising in 1968.

I worked in a liberal white area where most people, including me, never met a Black Panther. But I liked the Black Panther call for full employment, bread, housing, education and justice, and for all Black men to be exempt from military service. I joined the efforts to get Hanrahan out of office during the same election that brought Richard Nixon into the White House. Knocking on doors and handing out leaflets was not new to me. I'd done that years before with my Mennonite Brethren youth group

**"Our experience taught us  
that we in the so-called First  
World directly benefitted from  
an international economic  
system that was sucking the  
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sisters and brothers."**

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in preparation for the Billy Graham Crusade in Winnipeg. We considered Graham a prophetic voice for salvation. The shift in the *Zeigeist* and study at the seminary opened my eyes to other prophetic strands like Micah proclaiming, "Let justice roll down like the waters" and Isaiah saying, "Remove the chains of oppression and the yoke of injustice, and let the oppressed go free."

That prophetic vision for justice was embodied in the Philippine movement during the Marcos martial law years, and I felt privileged to be a witness/participant when my husband and I were MCC country directors there in the late 1970s. Our experience taught us that we in the so-called First World benefitted directly from an international economic system that was sucking the lifeblood from our Filipino sisters and brothers. We appealed to our community—the white, middle-class beneficiaries of the dribble-down—to stop collaborating. In the spiritually barren Reagan-Bush years, many people in our churches and institutions resisted that idea.

*A woman about my age relights her sputtering candle from mine and whispers, "If we could have kept control of our programs, we'd be a strong community now with vision, instead of one taking handouts from a government that copied our ideas" (free breakfast for children, free neighborhood clinics, community control of police). For the government, it was a way to regain control of the population.*

Their practical programs for serving the people withered as hundreds of Panthers were imprisoned and at least 27 were killed as a result of COINTELPRO, the U.S. government domestic counter-insurgency program. That wasn't so different from what happened in the Philippines in the 1970s and 80s. Growing numbers of grass roots activists were arrested or shot, and we had to focus on protection of human rights rather than a just economic order. Prophetic visions and actions are damped down or forced to detour in response to massive violence. (An aside: it was heartening to see the large-scale demonstrations

at the World Trade Organization meetings in Seattle in December 1999. They helped refocus popular attention on issues of equity, a fitting introit to the New Millennium.)

*The next speaker, streaks of gray in his hair, points at the new building on the site of the former bullet-riddled Panther house. "They built this to squash the revolutionary memories, to hide what happened. This new construction is for whites with money. Original residents are being pushed out." I cringe. I've lived in this neighborhood for 12 years. With all good intentions, I supported the development work. Is it simply a function of age? At 25 I railed against the system, at 50 I admit there's no way to step out of the system, so I try to make it work for the good of more people. Is that what happened to the prophetic voice?"*

In the late 1980s, dictatorships around the world were tumbling. The Philippine struggle created a tiny democratic space to work at dismantling a corrupt military and instituting genuine land reform. In a parallel course, I turned my attention to the Chicago neighborhood where I lived, hoping to be part of a practical people's movement at the grass-roots level. The local community organization fought against proposed sports stadiums, luxury hotels and restaurants that would have wiped out the neighborhood.

Twelve years later, there is residential housing, a park, a library named for one of the seniors who gave us gumption, a bank and the promise of a drugstore. Two-flats



### Women in ministry

**On August 1, 2000, Muriel Bechtel, Toronto, Ont., will begin a new assignment as Minister of Pastoral Services for Mennonite Church of Eastern Canada.**

**Meg O'Brien, Harrisonburg, Va., began as co-pastor of Community Mennonite Church in September 1999.**

**Sylvia Rodriguez, Salem, Oreg. was recently licensed to serve with her husband as co-pastor of El Monte Calvario. She is the first woman to receive a license for pastoral work in the Pacific Conference of the Brethren in Christ Church.**

were built so people could rent out an apartment for extra income and thus afford to stay in the area. In contrast to other Chicago neighborhoods hostile to public housing, the predominantly home-owner organization worked, albeit gingerly at first, with the public housing residents. These two strategies helped to discourage white yuppie sprawl from the city center and suburb. But the physical rebuilding of a long-neglected community required outside capital and a closer level of cooperation with political authorities. Subtle decisions along the way shifted the mind set from empowerment of people to one that said it was more efficient to make friends in high places to get things done in the complex world of development. There were a few local gains, yes, but essentially our community development served as a pawn in the larger scheme of pushing poor Blacks from the city center to make way for moneyed Whites to increase the city's tax base. Mayor Daley, the son of the mayor who gave the "shoot to kill" order on these same streets, accomplished all of this without one bullet. There are many strategies for the few to maintain their control. My 12 years here showed me the nitty-gritty ways in which a vision blurs in the face of overwhelming economic power.

*I glance at the fresh-cheeked White students beside me on the street, here in Chicago for their urban semester. A few hours earlier I'd worked with their anti-racism accountability group on how Whites can be appropriate allies against racism. The Panther-turned-pastor at the microphone commends the young White people for their presence. A sign of hope, he says.*

It's true. These young people are positioned a little closer to becoming educated anti-racist activists than I was at their age. However, they carry enormous college tuition debts that have already hooked them into mainstream economics, another way to divert the prophetic voice. It's not enough to hope young people can do what I did not do. The fresh energy of youth has to be supported by those middle-aged and old among us who have experienced the myriad ways we can be subverted. It takes an inter-generational village to make a prophetic voice heard.

**Dorothy Friesen lives in Chicago, Ill., with her husband, Gene Stoltzfus, and volunteers with various community-based organizations in her neighborhood. She is the author of two books, *Critical Choices: A Journey with the Filipino People* (Eerdmans, 1988) and a romance novel, *Stormy Ties* (Avalon Books, 1997).**

## News and verbs

- Ruth Kampen, Vancouver, B.C., recently finished an M.A. thesis on the subject *Submission, Silence and Shame: Mennonite Women's Experiences of Wife Abuse*. Her research, conducted in British Columbia, focused on nine women who were members of Mennonite churches. Kampen writes, "Mennonites were selected because of their conservative theological teachings and their historical tradition as a 'peace church.'" For more information, contact Kathryn Mitchell Loewen, Women's Concerns Coordinator, MCC Canada, email kml@mennonitecc.ca or telephone (204) 261-6381.
- MCC Manitoba recently appointed Eleanor Epp Stobbe as director of Voices for Non-Violence, continuing a program originally under the auspices of MCC Canada.
- The MCC U.S. Committee on Women's Concerns welcomes Noreen Trautwein, Upland, Calif. as the Brethren in Christ representative to MCC U.S. Women's Concerns. Noreen is a psychotherapist in private practice. Since 1996, she has also been associated with Pacific Lifeline, a women's and children's shelter in Upland.
- "World March of Women in the Year 2000" was launched to mark the occasion of the first International Women's Day of the new millennium—March 8, 2000. Conceived by the *Federation des femmes du Quebec* (FFQ), the movement seeks to publicize demands for concrete changes to combat worldwide poverty and violence against women. Women and men around the world are invited to add their signatures to a document that will be delivered to the United Nations on October 17, 2000. For more information, visit the FFQ website at [www.ffq.qc.ca/marche2000](http://www.ffq.qc.ca/marche2000), email [marche2000@ffq.qc.ca](mailto:marche2000@ffq.qc.ca) or call 514-395-1196.

WOMEN'S CONCERN REPORT is published bimonthly by the MCC Committees on Women's Concerns. We believe that Jesus Christ teaches equality of all persons. By sharing information and ideas, the committees strive to promote new relationships and corresponding supporting structures through which women and men can grow toward wholeness and mutuality. Articles and views presented in REPORT do not necessarily reflect official positions of the Committees on Women's Concerns. Please do not reproduce without permission.

WOMEN'S CONCERN REPORT is edited by Louise Stoltzfus. Layout by Beth Oberholzer Design.

Subscription cost is \$12 U.S./\$15 Cdn. for one year or \$20 U.S./\$25 Cdn. for two years. Send all subscriptions, correspondence and address changes to Editor, MCC Women's Concerns, P.O. Box 500, Akron, PA 17501-0500; telephone 717-859-3889; fax 717-859-3875. Canadian subscribers may pay in Canadian currency.

This newsletter is printed on recycled paper.

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